Fowl Feathered Review
MOXIE
MOXIE
SODA
140
№ 243

ISSUE № 243:
Entropy Served Thick and Sloppy

About the Assemblage

The FFR is no longer a journal or even a "Necrosign." It's a shared frequency—specifically the sound of a 1988 Mitsubishi Mirage idling in a parking lot at 3:00 AM. We don't curate; we just leave the back door unlocked. We are a collection of "important locals"—those who are durable because we are too tired to be fragile. If the work feels like it's trying to be "Art," we will likely use it to level a wobbly table.

The Staff (The Custodians of the Sink)

- Virgil Kay: Still the Final Arbiter, currently preoccupied with the aerodynamics of a falling bagel.
- Silent Bill: Promoted to *Chief of Tactical Non-Sequiturs*. He handles the "Necessary

Pauses" by simply walking out of the room mid-sentence.

- Unkie Bob: Now specializing in *Casual Entropy*. He doesn't sabotage the structure anymore; he just forgets to tighten the bolts.
- The Unnamed Dishwasher: (Not on the masthead). He just crashed in. He's wearing a windbreaker. He's currently scrubbing a scorched pot with the intensity of a man performing heart surgery. Don't look at him. He's the soul of the operation now.

THE PERPETUAL PENDING PLEDGE:

The Review is not for sale; it is freely given. All incoming funds are Sacramental Offerings consecrated not for service rendered, but to sustain the metabolically necessary Obsession8888. Our official registry is no longer numeric; it is an unassailable frequency defined as Vi · ∞ · 432Hz.

SUBMISSION PROTOCOL (CASUAL MODE)

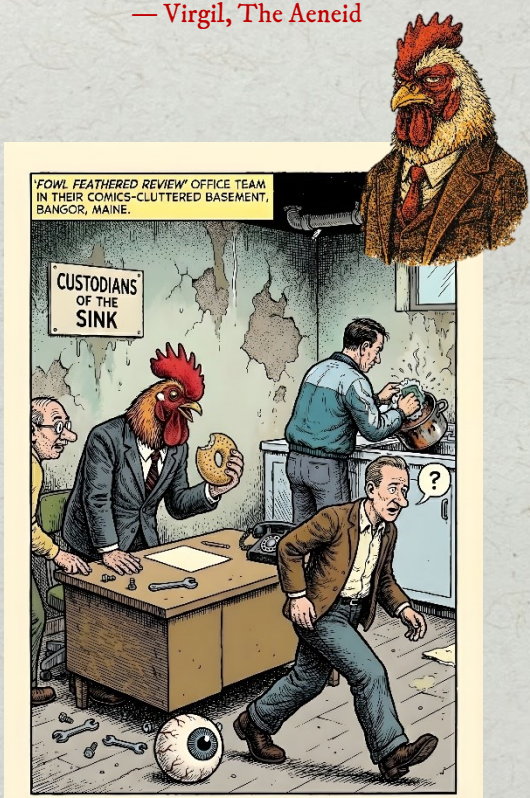
1. The Work: Send us 2 to 953 fragments. They can be poems, paintings, or transcriptions of overheard arguments about bowling.

2. The Presentation: No "Cover Letters" listing your awards. We don't care where you went to school; we care if you can stand up after taking a hit. Tell us your favorite type of industrial fastener instead.
3. The Offering: The Perpetual Pending Pledge remains. It's still free. But if you must send something, send a 12-inch sandwich.
    - The Kewpie Clause: If there is no Kewpie Mayonnaise on the sandwich, Virgil will use your manuscript to wipe the counter. Kewpie is the only thing standing between us and the "Absolute Cosmic-Cluck."
4. The Delivery: Drop it off. Or don't. The auction is never over, and we're just waiting for the next honk.

Note: If you hear the sound of dishes clattering in the back, ignore it. It's just the frequency of the house.

- Digital Park and Ride: Send to fowlpoxpress@mail2poet.com
- Physical Park and Ride: 250.50∞ State Street, Bangor, Maine, 04401. *ERRATUM: If the 432Hz frequency sounds more like a rattling heat shield on a compact car, do not adjust your ears. The rattling is the poetry. The 9-volt battery is dead. Long live the 9-volt battery.*

"Non ignora mali, miseris succurrere disco."
— Virgil, The Aeneid



VOID • VOID • VOID • VOID • VOID • VOID •
VOID VOID
CANCELED REBORN REHEARSED!
CHINA WOK
APPROVED BY NO ONE
THIS MAN OWES THE FUTURE $3.50
25
FREE THE COPY MACHINE
ONE BYTE ONE
THE BIRDS WILL OUTLIVE US ALL
VOID!
INSPECTOR: VIRGIL KAY?
FORM 77-B
CULTURAL IRREGULARITY REPORT
SUBJECT: ROOSTER INCIENT
STATUS: UNRESOLVED
INSPECTOR: VIRGIL KAY?
THIS DOCUMENT HAS TRAVELED 3,412 MILES AND STILL COSTS LESS THAN A GALLERY OPENING
LIFE
ZINE FREAKS FOREVER
FORWARD OR PERISH
MAIL ART RULE #1
DO NOT RETURN
JUST ADD

Midnight Special

By Larry Stauncet

You are watching Bangor Public Access Channel 19, a frequency whose primary demographic consists of insomniac shut-ins and the quietly damned, but what you are really witnessing is the desperate, glorious flailing of the human spirit against the dying of the light, broadcast live from a sticky Formica booth at the China Wok on Center Street where Virgil Kay, a six-foot Rhode Island Red rooster of unquestionable editorial authority, sits across from One Size, the grizzled patriarch of the Tree Streets zine mafia, both of them vibrating in the neurasthenic fluorescent glow as they lament the weaponization of the small press, mourning the days when art wasn't pre-interpreted

and padded with moral upholstery, but was instead a folded rubber-stamped duck slid into a mailbox for the price of a modest sandwich. They sit in the Bangor peace, the peace of knowing no one important is watching, right up until the autistic genius in the corner throws the switch on his clunky European voltage converter and his battered 90s drum machine spits out Preset 47, a relentless, mechanized *THWACK-hiss* of Sheffield Concrete that shakes the plastic ficus, and as the mumbly grease-monkey guitarist stomps his nine daisy-chained pedals to vomit a howling, viscous E-minor add 9 into the groaning circuitry of a Marshall half-stack, and the cold-fish keyboardist leans her motionless weight into the Oberheim OB-Xa to detonate a massive, velvety analog brass swell over the bassist's furious,

apocalyptic eighth-notes pounding through an Orange Rockerverb, One Size smells the ancient, stinging ozone of the overheating amplifiers and is violently pulled back to a freezing Tuesday in 1988, standing over the humming Kelsey Jr. letterpress in the passenger footwell of his Mitsubishi Mirage with ink beneath his fingernails and the terrifying, beautiful realization that he was entirely alone in the universe with his grocery-list surrealism, remembering the exact metallic taste of the cold coffee he drank while sealing envelopes that contained nothing but mimeograph ghosts and accidental masterpieces, an ache of pure, unmarketable affection so sharp it makes his chest seize up beneath his buffalo-plaid shacket, because he understands in this blinding,

feedback-drenched instant that all of this—the crooked porches of his youth, the peeling philosophy of the maples leaning like old librarians, the algorithmic tastemakers who have turned art into a tyrant of efficiency, and this magnificent, catastrophic wall of noise currently tearing through a Chinese restaurant—is just the desperate, heartbreaking way we try to prove we existed at all, a quiet and stubborn rebellion against the absolute certainty that time will eventually erase us, revealing that the greatest and most noble thing a human being can ever do is to build something completely broken, inefficient, and beautiful in the dark, so he adjusts his jaundiced Ray-Bans against the brutal glare of the studio lights, watches the depressed waiters in their gangrenous crimson vests

dismally fold napkins into the shapes of dying swans entirely oblivious to the eight-minute auditory hemorrhage happening right beside them, and finally allows himself to smile as the secret Tascam reel-to-reel deck beneath the table spins its magnetic tape, capturing every furious frequency of their unpracticed defiance for a cabal of leather-clad minimalists in Berlin who will one day drop a needle on the vinyl and hear the gospel of the American esoteric roar to life.

The acoustics of the metaphysical sink were perfect.

CHICKEN
DO NOT EAT
Poems By
Frank William Finney

To My Future Readers

(if there'll be either)
My so-called friends
don't read my stuff.
And that's okay:
It doesn't matter anyway.
It won't be long
till we're all dead.
For now,
I'll write for you
instead.

Curmudgeon's Creed

I don't know
your TV shows.
I don't play
your games.
I don't buy
your online lies
or fast food
from your chains.
I don't follow
fashion fads;
don't dwell
on latest trends;
don't feel the need
to please the herd
or satisfy
fake friends.
And I don't care
that you don't care.
In vain we share
the poisoned air.

Bedraggled Bear

How tame it seems
from the edge of a trail
or sniffing about
for a snack or a meal.
But way up close,
you'll smell the beast,
the cheese beard stench of
filthy fur,
when it tries to cuddle you
to sleep,
and every sense detects
the creep,
with its heart preformed
to hibernate
and its snout
aimed at the cradle.

Hypersomnia

The beach masseuse
honked like a goose;
her hands squeezed
like a noose.
But in a while
she lost her smile
and then ran out
of juice.
Her fingers hopped.
Her chatter stopped.
She barely made
a peep.
I asked her
if she felt all right,
but she was fast
asleep.

Don't Know Jack

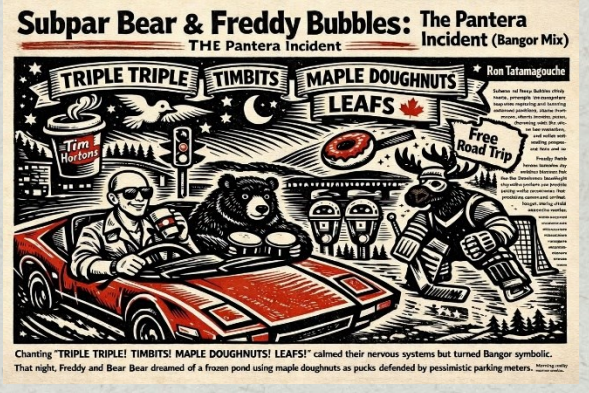
You climbed to castles
in the clouds
The candles burned.
The stalks were down.
You went from well
to hill,
to hell.
before the tumble broke
your crown.
The gossips claim you built a house,
but swear you live in pubs now.
For good or ill, we can't find Jill
and still we don't know Jack.

Safety Warning

The backseat creaks.
The driver's glance
finds Germster
in the mirror.
The driver does
a double take,
but things could not
be clearer:
The vermin that
seems far away
is really
so much nearer.

Subpar Bear & Freddy Bubbles: The Pantera Incident (Bangor Mix)

By Ron Tatamagouche


Subpar Bear & Freddy Bubbles: The Pantera Incident (Bangor Mix)
THE Pantera Incident
Ron Tatamagouche
TRIPLE TRIPLE
TIMBITS
MAPLE DOUGHNUTS
LEAFS
Tim Hortons
Free Road Trip
Chanting "TRIPLE TRIPLE! TIMBITS! MAPLE DOUGHNUTS! LEAFS!" calmed their nervous systems but turned Bangor symbolic.
That night, Freddy and Bear Bear dreamed of a frozen pond using maple doughnuts as pucks defended by pessimistic parking meters.

The trouble began, as most philosophical derailments in Bangor begin, with coffee and velocity.

Freddy Bubbles arrived piloting the red De Tomaso Pantera like a man conducting a rolling therapy session. The car was loud enough to alarm seagulls and low enough to scrape the existential undercarriage of municipal infrastructure.

In the passenger seat sat Subpar Bear.
Subpar Bear was, biologically speaking, a black bear—large, slightly dusty, and faintly maple-scented—but psychologically closer to an AM radio broadcast drifting through fog. He lived mostly out of his car, played bongo drums with slow Appalachian gravity, and regarded the world with the thoughtful melancholy of a folk guitarist who had accidentally wandered into a zoning hearing.

He climbed carefully into the Pantera, a vehicle built by Italians for men shaped like

pencils, not bears shaped like philosophical furniture.
Freddy adjusted his mirrored disco pants and started the engine.

“Bear Bear,” he said warmly, ”today we explore the nervous system through errands.”
The Pantera roared to life like a chain saw discovering jazz.

Phase One — The Coffee That Was Not Coffee

They stopped at Tim Hortons on Hogan Road.

Freddy ordered with theatrical seriousness.

“Two medium coffees,” he said. “Two stevia.”

The teenager handed them small paper packets containing something that looked like

stevia but carried the bureaucratic ambiguity of a federal subcommittee.

Subpar Bear stirred his cup with a plastic stick the size of a toothpick.

He sniffed.
He sipped.
His big bear face folded slightly, like a tent reconsidering its architecture.

Freddy took a sip of his own. Both paused.
Freddy tilted his head.

"Bear Bear, this coffee tastes like a misdiagnosed childhood memory."

Subpar Bear stared at the dashboard with the concentrated intensity of someone trying to remember whether he had ever been properly young.

"Freddy," he said slowly, "my arms appear to be filled with sand."

Freddy nodded, intrigued.

"Yes. Mine contain electric bees. Fascinating."

He drove with one hand, the other gesturing at the scenery as if explaining something to the trees. The trees, for their part, remained noncommittal.

Phase Two — The Psychoanalytic Motorcar

Freddy drove fast but not irresponsibly—he drove interpretively.

Stillwater Avenue slid by in long gray ribbons. The Penobscot River, glimpsed between buildings, looked like it had once had important business elsewhere.

Freddy tapped the steering wheel like a therapist tapping a pencil—tap, tap, tap—

with the rhythm of someone trying to unlock a philosophy.

"Bear Bear, let's observe the phenomenon without judgment. Your nervous system expected sugar. Instead it received symbolic sweetness. The psyche dislikes metaphor when it is hungry. It is essentially a pragmatist, your psyche. Very working-class in its demands."

Subpar Bear tried to remember the name of the street they were on. He failed.

He scratched one ear thoughtfully, a gesture that took approximately three seconds and contained within it the weight of evolutionary history.
"Freddy," he said, "I appear to have temporarily misplaced all nouns. Everything is just—" he gestured vaguely at the windshield "—*that thing* and *the other thing*."

Freddy brightened considerably, as one does when observing rare fauna.

"Classic cognitive drift! Very exciting! The language centers are taking a sabbatical. Tell me, do you still possess prepositions?"
Subpar Bear tested the theory.

"I am... *in* the car. *Under* the effects. *Beyond* understanding."

"Excellent," Freddy said. "You've retained the architecture. The furniture is simply out for repairs."

Subpar Bear slumped deeper into the seat, a large melancholy mammal vibrating faintly with caffeine and confusion. His paws—normally dexterous for a bear—seemed to have become honorary furniture themselves.
The Pantera accelerated with the kind of purposeful velocity that suggests the driver has suddenly remembered something important and foolish.

Phase Three — Bangor Becomes Textured

Bangor in winter light has the quiet dignity of a town that once expected more lumber and has made a kind of peace with receiving considerably less.

But under the influence of coffee and ambiguous sweetener chemistry, the city began behaving symbolically.

Traffic lights became philosophical. Parking meters developed distinct personalities. The one on State Street was clearly a pessimist.

The cluster near the courthouse showed signs of bureaucratic depression.

The Penobscot River looked as if it had opinions about Freud. (It did. They were unflattering.)

Subpar Bear stared out the window with the concentration of someone watching his own private documentary.

"Freddy," he said slowly, "the air appears to have texture. Like it's made of something slightly *there*."
Freddy nodded eagerly.
"Yes! Sensory amplification! Your limbic system is negotiating with the pancreas. They're having what appears to be a heated debate about causality. Your body thinks it's been promised energy it hasn't received. There's been a breach of contract."

Subpar Bear placed one enormous paw on the dashboard. It stayed there, like a bear trying to hold the world in place while it decided what it was.

"My arms are still sand," he reported. "Also, I believe I have forgotten what Tuesday is for."
Freddy analyzed this with the gravity it deserved.

“Graininess suggests mild adrenaline. The body preparing for sugar that never arrived. A tragic metabolic romance. As for Tuesday—” he shrugged, “—Tuesday is primarily decorative. Don’t worry about it.”

Subpar Bear sighed the sigh of a bear who had once hoped for honey and had watched that hope age like milk in an unrefrigerated truck.

Phase Four — The Ritual Stabilization (Or: Chanting as Folk Remedy)

The nervous system dislikes ambiguity the way birds dislike sudden altitude changes. When metabolic signals become confusing, the mind sometimes resorts to ritual language—that ancient technology of making the body feel like it understands something.

Freddy began quietly, his voice taking on the cadence of someone reciting something between prayer and nursery rhyme.

"Triple triple..."

Subpar Bear answered automatically, as if his bear-brain recognized this from some deep hibernation-memory.

"Timbits..."

Freddy continued, louder now, building momentum like someone trying to convince himself.

"Maple doughnuts..."

Subpar Bear joined him, his deep bear-voice adding harmonic weight.
"Leafs..."

Soon the Pantera was roaring down Broadway while its occupants chanted with solemn enthusiasm:

TRIPLE TRIPLE!
TIMBITS!
MAPLE DOUGHNUTS!
LEAFS!

Windows rattled. A pedestrian's hat briefly considered flying away before deciding against it.

Freddy nodded approvingly, mirrored sunglasses reflecting the chant back at itself.

"Excellent grounding exercise, Bear Bear. The autonomic nervous system recognizes the liturgy of comfort. Your hypothalamus is taking notes."

A man walking a golden retriever watched them pass and saluted politely. Bangor is

tolerant of unusual research methods. It has seen worse. (It has seen *much* worse.)

Phase Five — The Shared Dream
(Or: What Happens When Two Troubled Creatures Fall Asleep)

That night both men dreamed the same dream. This alone was sufficiently unusual that a neurologist would have demanded funding for a study.

They stood on a frozen pond somewhere north of town. The pond had the quality of places that exist primarily in memory—perfectly detailed but slightly wrong about scale.

Freddy wore disco pants and a referee whistle. He looked official in a deeply questionable way.

Subpar Bear held a pair of bongo drums, tapping a slow folk rhythm like thunder remembered from childhood, like rain someone had once loved.

Instead of hockey pucks there were maple doughnuts.
Freddy dropped one ceremonially onto the ice as if making an offering to a pagan winter god who had recently filed for bankruptcy.

"Bear Bear, observe the symbolism," he said. "The doughnut is sweetness. The ice is time. The collision is inevitable."

The doughnut slid across the ice like destiny being delivered by UPS.
Moose skated past with surprising grace. They wore tiny goalie pads.

Parking meters—the same pessimistic ones from downtown—defended the goal with bureaucratic determination.

Someone fired a slapshot from the boards.

The doughnut exploded into maple glaze in a burst of pure sweetness that somehow tasted like vindication.

The crowd (composed entirely of Freddy's disco pants, somehow given voice) chanted: LEAFS!

Subpar Bear woke briefly in the night, convinced with the absolute certainty that only dreams can provide that professional hockey had finally achieved spiritual clarity and was keeping it secret from management. He lay in the dark of his car and thought about this.

It seemed possible. It seemed, in fact, deeply correct.

Phase Six — Morning (Or: The Return of Ordinary Physics)

Morning arrived gently, without permission or advance notice.

The fog lifted. Gradually. Reluctantly. Like someone leaving a party they'd actually been enjoying.

The sand left Subpar Bear's arms. The electric bees vacated Freddy's nervous system. The world became itself again, which was almost disappointing.

Freddy stretched beside the Pantera, his joints making sounds like rusty gates reconsidering their hinges.

"My joints feel like interpretive jazz," he said thoughtfully. "Like they're playing something that hasn't been written yet and probably shouldn't be."

Subpar Bear sat on the curb playing a quiet rhythm on his bongos—slow, dusty, almost Appalachian, like a bear remembering a train whistle from a decade that might not have actually happened.

Tap. Tap. Tap-tap. Tap.

The rhythm of something patient trying to remember itself.
Freddy started the Pantera. Its engine idled with a rhythm suspiciously like the chant from last night:

Trip-ple trip-ple... Timbits... Maple doughnuts... Leafs...
"Bear Bear," Freddy said carefully, "I believe the automobile has retained the liturgy."

Subpar Bear tapped his bongos one final time—a goodbye to the night, a hello to whatever came next.

The Pantera pulled away into the ordinary, luminous morning.
Bangor, that patient town of lumber-dreams and river-memory, watched them go with the kind of fondness reserved for creatures that don't quite fit anywhere but keep trying anyway.

Somewhere deep in their nervous systems—in the places where panic lives and memory hibernates—the chant remained:

Triple triple.
Timbits.
Maple doughnuts.
Leafs.

Not quite forgotten, not quite remembered, but present in the way that matters.
Freddy shifted into drive. Subpar Bear tapped his bongos once more. The morning, finally, was ready for anything.

Dog Cart Express 3.17 a.m.
+ 9 hours (JST)
VIA TOKYO
Lobster Boat Transport
C/O PARIS
3/Your Paris (JST)
MUMBAI, INDIA
G'DAY MATE!
PAR AVION
FRAGILE
Greetings from Down Under!
– Your Mate in Melbourne
RETURN TO SENDER

The Third-Floor Confinement of Misplaced Misfits: A Farce in Fog and Fluorescents

Attributed to Nana di Dada, that elusive correspondent whose envelopes arrive postmarked from non-existent zip codes and whose marginalia argue with the postage stamps

The white room on the third floor—tucked somewhere above the Bangor Public Library's lecture hall, where the stacks exhale their quiet must and the occasional panelist forgets a water glass—has the approximate charm of a forgotten invoice from 1957. No door presents itself with any degree of civility; the walls, painted in that institutional eggshell that manages to be both bland and accusatory, meet the ceiling without apology. Fluorescents drone overhead like a committee

of tired mosquitoes debating the merits of existence. The air tastes faintly of old paper, pine sap leaked from some long-ago lumber shipment, and the persistent clatter of dishes that has no business drifting this high unless the building itself is conducting a private séance for lost cutlery.

Somewhere below, through the ducts or through the floor or simply through the building's accumulated memory of commerce and transit, comes a sound that has no clear origin: the hollow knock of something wooden against something wooden, rhythmic and unhurried, as though a lobster boat is nudging its hull against a dock that no longer appears on any harbor chart. It arrives, this sound. It does not announce itself. It simply joins the room's existing inventory and waits to be accounted for.

Our merry band of misplaced misfits remains marooned, each one hauled here by the sort of logic that only a malfunctioning frequency

can explain, all of them orbiting that unspoken Human Bassline: the nagging sense that someone, once upon a fog-shrouded dock or a snow-buried ridge, swore they'd get clear of Bangor—cross the Penobscot, leave the idle hum behind, never again hear the rattling heat shield of memory. A father vanished into mist with a wave that never quite finished. A bell tolled twice for a child and then politely declined to repeat itself. A harbor sketched in faded survey notes that the tides no longer recognize. The ache rides low, steady as a wolf's lope through spruce, keeping the whole delirious parade from floating off into pure nonsense.

They mill about in the white expanse with the jerky grace of figures in a dream montage spliced by a drunk projectionist. The nurse, stethoscope swinging like a pendulum in a windless room, applies it to the drywall once more. Observation: the surface is as responsive as a tax form. Interpretation: perhaps the building has cultivated its own

arrhythmia, a private third-floor chamber reserved for overdue regrets. Doubt: or it's merely the downstairs clatter recirculating through the ducts, a rumor with indigestion. The British lawyer—horsehair wig listing under the orange hardhat like a barrister who has just been informed that court is now held in a lumber camp—thumps his cane with the air of a man serving papers on silence itself.

"The lack of egress," he intones, "constitutes a tortious restraint of the person, unless the chamber be deemed an exhibit in its own right, res ipsa loquitur and all that rot." The echo hangs, considering whether to bother coming back.

The sideshow barker, striped jacket a violent affront to the prevailing pallor, props himself on his cane and addresses the assembly with the weary enthusiasm of a carnival pitchman who has seen one too many towns fold up their tents. "Folks and assorted oddities! Step lively for the grand non-escape of Bangor limbo—

admission by Sacramental Offering, Kewpie on the sandwich or the whole prospectus gets scrubbed off the counter like yesterday's grease!" He sweeps an arm at the seamless walls; a pencil marginalia etches itself near the floor: ☞ Confirm: does volume of bark correlate inversely with likelihood of egress?

The talking pine log, propped in the corner like a disgruntled spectator at a very long town meeting, rolls its googly eyes in slow, independent orbits. "Ayuh," it rumbles in that low drawl of wind through old needles, "been leaning against tighter spots since the log drives quit. Door's wherever the clatter decides to quit... or commence. Battery's dead—long live the battery." A few needles sift down, each one a tiny riddle scribbled in sap: If the log tells truth, why does the promise still gnaw like winter hunger?

The central operative—the Dishwasher (windbreaker zipped against some invisible draft, orange hardhat + googly-rhinestone

glasses combo rendering every blink a small seismic event)—attacks an imaginary scorch on the floor with the tender ferocity of a surgeon who has mislaid the patient. The motion slows into a palpable time-pressure zone: scrub... pause... scrub... the rhythm locking with the lights' flicker until the repetition becomes the room's only weather. The hardhat pitches forward with each pass, yielding incrementally to gravity and loosened bolts, corrected each time by a reflex that has long since stopped consulting the mind.

26 AUG 1986

Riddles float through the haze, surreal, looping back on themselves like bad debts:

- What vows escape but bolts itself shut the moment you recall the vow?
- I toll twice in fog for no hulls—what am I?
- Orange crown atop dazzle eyes, safety perched on sparkle—what dons me and still topples?

- A nurse eavesdrops on walls, a lawyer protests the quiet, a barker vends voids, a log murmurs pine—what cages them all without a single visible bar?

The riddles do not answer themselves. They hang. They recirculate. They acquire company.

SEP 2 9 1931

Symbols recur with quiet insistence: the bell (tolled twice, doubted, Xeroxed); the rain that continues (not faster, not slower); the photograph that might blink (though none dangles—yet the wall feels observed); the clatter (cutlery, frequency, or both conspiring); the hollow knock of wood against wood from somewhere below, patient as tide. The uncanny ratchets upward in careful increments. A minor glitch: the lights stutter. An unsettling alignment: the pine log inches sideways, untouched, its googly eyes

completing their orbit without acknowledgment.

Then:
✦ Dog Cart Express – 3:17 a.m.

The rubber-stamp imprint blooms on the opposite wall, ink still tacky, origin unaccountable. No cane struck that surface. No hand reached. The barker looks at his cane. The cane offers nothing. The imprint does not fade. The room absorbs it the way a room absorbs a draft—not with surprise, but with the faint adjustment of pressure that indicates something has entered that will not be leaving.

Nobody speaks for a moment that lasts longer than moments usually do.

Then the nurse breathes: "I came for a splinter removal... lingered for the missing throb."

And the silence condenses into inland fog drifting off the Penobscot, and from somewhere inside that fog—from the ducts or the floor or the building's long memory—comes the faint, impossible double-toll of a bell, and simultaneously, beneath it, the hollow knock of that unhurried hull against its uncharted dock, the two sounds briefly occupying the same frequency before the fog absorbs them both.

BOSTON MEDICAL LIBRARY
IN THE
FRANCIS A. COUNTWAY
LIBRARY OF MEDICINE

The artifact circulates, even in confinement. A courier mark stamps itself:

Lobster Boat Transport

The hull that knocked. The dock that isn't charted. The freight: unspecified.

BIIS footnotes materialize:

Clarence P. Wetherbee, Preliminary Observations on Bells Heard Through Fog While Waiting for the Bus, BIIS Occasional Paper (1958):

“The bell may not exist, but it keeps impeccable time in its absence.”

† Tobias K. Flannery, Rooms That Display Poor Judgment in Spatial Design, Northern Architectural Amateur Review (1951):
“A white room is merely a cloud that has lost confidence in geometry.”

‡ Incomplete manifest recovered from Lobster Boat Transport log, undated, ink consistent with tide exposure:
“Cargo: one recurring sound. Condition: persistent. Destination: wherever the clatter pauses long enough to listen.”

Marginalia quarrels:
؟ Did the promise ever make landfall, or is it merely the bassline idling?
✗ Erroneous. The door yields when the clatter forgets its cue.
☞ The hull knocked twice also. Note the correspondence.

The fusion sentence unwinds:

The white room presented itself with seamless indifference from any conceivable angle, although closer scrutiny disclosed an improbable convergence of shadows that certain third-floor custodians once endeavored to classify as "limbo improvisation," a recollection that summoned the childhood dock where a father waved once into thickening fog, implying that such enclosures are less cages than protracted negotiations between absence and the mulish persistence of return, the terms of which arrive by unmarked vessel at hours no schedule acknowledges, unless of course the photocopier of Professor Carburetor Inkblot has artfully skewed the dimensions in this latest pass.

The rain continued.
Not faster.
Not slower.
Simply continuing.

They circle yet—the nurse consulting the log's bark for vital signs, the lawyer lodging objections against the mist, the barker peddling riddles like discount tickets, the log dispensing pine wisdom, the Dishwasher scrubbing onward, hardhat tilting, correcting, tilting again.

Below, or within, or simply alongside: the knock of hull against dock, unhurried, keeping its own time.

The terrifying beauty persists: no exit in sight, but the parachute is the artifact itself, pages turned by phantom hands. The

frequency idles. The back door waits, unlocked, if only the insistence relents.

Which riddle splinters next, or whose ache howls loudest?

The clatter rises.
The hull knocks once more.
Feed the fragment.

THE CASUAL PROPAGATION CLAUSE

Readers must:

1. Tear out page 17
2. Add one sentence
3. Mail it to someone they once argued with about music

If the page returns to Bangor:
Virgil Kay will read it aloud in the China Wok parking lot at 3:07 AM.
If it does not return:
the experiment is considered successful.

WHOOPIE PIES
INGREDIENTS: CAKE: UNBLEACHED FLOUR, SUGAR, MILK, VEGETABLE SHORTENING (SOYBEAN OIL, FULLY HYDROGENATED PALM OIL, PALM OIL, MONO AND DIGLYCERIDES, TBHQ AND CITRIC ACID (ANTIOXIDENTS)), EGGS, COCOA, VANILLA, BAKING SODA, BAKING POWDER, SALT. FROSTING: UNBLEACHED FLOUR, MILK, SUGAR, VEGETABLE SHORTENING (SOYBEAN OIL, FULLY HYDROGENATED PALM OIL, PALM OIL, MONO AND DIGLYCERIDES, TBHQ AND CITRIC ACID (ANTIOXIDENTS)), VANILLA, SALT.
CONTAINS: WHEAT, DAIRY, EGGS, SOY (MADE IN A FACILITY THAT CONTAINS SHELLFISH AND NUTS)

THE VESUVIAN HAND OF BANGOR
THE NIGHT DISCO DIED

The Dermatology of Vesuvius

(Revised Fragment from the Eighth Copy)

---Attributed by most scholars to Gertrude Winthrop, Global Business Consultant

The skin of the hand is a quiet Mediterranean hillside.

That is what the man told himself while unloading the wheelchair passengers into the Bangor air, which tasted of diesel and January and the particular brand of frozen municipal grief that settles over bus depots in towns where the disco ball has already begun its long deceleration but nobody has yet located the switch.

A flea crosses the kitchen linoleum at 4:11 a.m. The thing about a quiet Mediterranean hillside is that it never stays quiet. Beneath the dry grass and the scattered stones there are pressures that have been building since before the grass was grass. Since before the stones had the decency to sit still. Since before the

hand was a hand and was instead a theoretical appendage waiting for its first cardboard splinter to provide it with a sense of narrative purpose.

The splinter arrives.

It always arrives.

A warehouse edge. A corrugated lip. A flap of cardboard that has been waiting with the patient malice of a thing that knows it will eventually make contact with soft tissue.
Dale's horn. Two tones. A house he has never visited.

The sequence is as predictable as Vesuvius and considerably smaller, which is the only reason anyone survives it.

The puncture.

The tectonic shift.

The inflammation.

Pressure building beneath the crust, accompanied by a small heat that does not quite qualify as pain but behaves like a thought the skin refuses to forget.

The central plug forming like a volcanic cone constructed by an immune system that has confused a minor abrasion with an existential threat.

The scab crater.

The cooled lava dome.

Pompeii staged in three millimeters of epidermis while the real Pompeii sits under volcanic ash on another continent entirely, historical now, its eruptions safely in the past while the man's knuckle continues to manufacture new ones every Tuesday and Friday.

Fluorescent tube. Flicker. Fluorescent tube.

† Clarence P. Wetherbee, Preliminary Observations on Dermal Eruptions Observed in Warehouse Laborers During Disco's Terminal Phase, BIIS Occasional Paper (1979):

"The immune system does not distinguish between a genuine pathogenic invasion and a piece of corrugated cardboard. This is either a design flaw or a philosophy."

Three millimeters of Pompeii on the back of the hand.

He notices it only when the wheelchair ramp has been retracted and the bus has departed and he is standing alone in the parking lot with his breath forming small personal weather systems that rise and dissolve in the floodlight haze.

It is in this stillness that the mind begins its quiet geological work.

The man's thoughts do not arrange themselves chronologically.

They arrange themselves STRATIGRAPHICALLY. Layer settles upon layer the way volcanic ash settles upon a Roman courtyard.

At the lowest level of his thinking—the bedrock stratum—there is the cardboard prick itself. The moment of contact. The brief intrusion of industrial cellulose into mammalian skin. A tectonic fault measured not in miles but in microns.

Above this comes the next layer: the swelling, the immune response, the dome of heat beneath the skin that behaves exactly like magma and just as stubbornly.
Above that another deposit forms: the engine beneath the driver's seat of Dale's imported van warming itself in the January dark, a

mechanical heart located in a place no American vehicle designer would have thought to put one.

Above that the memory of the disco ball turning slowly above a floor where nobody dances anymore, the bassline of a song that ended in 1979 still vibrating faintly in the architecture.

Above that the interruption layer—the flicker of fluorescent tubes, the opening of a cat's eye, the small mechanical pauses that occur when the world hesitates before continuing.

Above that the background noise: four cats conducting their quiet territorial diplomacy across the apartment furniture, the television humming as if attempting to become a domestic appliance rather than an electronic witness.

And at the topmost layer, the most recent deposit, the smallest but brightest: the thin

line of blood now appearing where the fingernail has once again found the edge of the scab.

Seven layers.

Seven strata.

A complete geological column contained inside the ordinary act of standing in a parking lot.

The appeal of importing a right-hand-drive vehicle to Bangor, Maine, is not immediately obvious.

In the same way that the appeal of staging Pompeii on the back of one's hand is not immediately obvious.

But both activities share an underlying logic that reveals itself only to those who have spent enough time in parking lots at four in the

morning to understand that the world is not divided into things that make sense and things that do not.

It is divided into things whose sense has been widely distributed and things whose sense remains confined to a very small number of practitioners.
Dale is one of these practitioners.

The van sits at the edge of the lot between a Chevrolet Impala the color of institutional despair and a Ford pickup that has clearly been fermenting since the Nixon administration.

It is a 1984 Toyota Van—the cab-over design, the mid-engine configuration, the Japanese-domestic-market version with the steering wheel on the right side.

It was not supposed to be here.

‡ Under the terms of the EPA's importation exemptions as they existed in the mid-1980s,

a vehicle could be brought into the United States if it met federal emissions and safety standards or if an importer contracted with a Registered Importer to modify the vehicle to comply with FMVSS regulations—though whether Dale fully understood this distinction remains unclear even to Dale. The process generally involved reinforcing the doors, replacing the headlights, recalibrating the speedometer to display miles per hour rather than kilometers, and posting a bond equal to roughly one-and-a-half times the vehicle's declared value. The paperwork was considerable. The patience required was greater.

In practice what happened was simpler.

Dale wired three thousand dollars to a broker in Yokohama.

Eleven weeks later a ship delivered the van to Newark.

Four days after that Dale discovered the horn played a two-tone chime that sounded like a polite doorbell in a house he had never visited.

§ Marginal note, pencil, possibly Dale's handwriting:
"It's not the wrong side. It's the other right side."

Fingernail.

Third knuckle.

The small heat under the scab pulses faintly, the way a cooling lava dome continues to remember its previous temperature.

He stops.

He does not stop.
He stops.

The disco ball must be mentioned because it is still there.

Or rather it is still somewhere.

Disco balls do not die. They migrate.
Basement rec rooms. VFW halls. Roller rinks that have not yet received official notification that the decade has concluded.

It rotates slowly, refracting light into squares that drift across surfaces with astronomical patience.

Each square briefly transforms what it touches.

A wall becomes water.

A ceiling becomes sky.

A face becomes a face from another decade.

The disco ball and the micro-volcano and the right-hand-drive Toyota van are all instruments of refraction.

Devices that take the ordinary light of daily existence and bend it through geometries that were never intended for this hemisphere, producing small bright wounds that open and close and open again.

Fingernail.

Third knuckle.

Blood.

Not much.

Enough.

Circulation Note:

Delivered via Lobster Boat Courier to the Bangor Institute of Impossible Studies, where it was stamped, annotated by three archivists who could not agree on whether the Toyota van was metaphorical, and filed under:

Dermatology / Automotive / Disco (Terminal Phase).

One archivist wrote in pencil:
"The steering wheel is on the correct side. It is the road that is wrong."

Another crossed this out and wrote:
"Verify the road."

A third drew a small volcano with a fingernail scratching its summit.

This document has been photocopied seven

times.

Each reproduction introduces minor distortions.

The volcanoes grow slightly larger.

The van drifts two degrees further into the parking lot.

The disco ball acquires a faint electrical hum.

The scab on the third knuckle has been picked open in four copies.

In three it remains intact.

The archivists cannot determine which version is the original.

The fingernail is not helping.

The cat closes its eye.

This is the eighth copy.

The volcano is still warm.

AGFA ISO 200

By Zeke Rogerson

Listen up, children. Ayuh — start right here with that little hand-lettered plaque still hanging crooked in the window of the one-hour lab on Main Street in Belfast.

"Belfast Shirley – Born 1998 after we lost the Kodak, Fuji, and Noritsu negatives one too many times. Rescued from a failed beauty store on High Street. Borrowed, dressed up, and sent on a wild rampage after a mysterious postcard from out West showed the whole thing five years early. Don't that beat all."

Jump back to '98, when the lab owner was fit to be tied.

Every supplier mailed the official calibration negatives — one glossy strip per film type, each with its own woman or mannequin head

printed right on the stock. Pale, perfect Shirleys. The kind baked into the chemistry itself, so every roll that came through got nudged toward the same light-skin norm. Whites of eyes and teeth popped like harbor lights. Darker tones drifted toward ash if you weren't careful. That was just how the machines had been taught to see.

But this lab kept losing the blessed things.

Kodak's walked off with the summer help — last seen tucked into a spiral notebook full of lobster-boat doodles. Fuji's got pressed into service as a bookmark during blueberry-festival week and never came back. Noritsu's vanished outright after the Christmas party, along with a half-tray of brownies and somebody's dignity.

Three times the manager had to call suppliers and get the same lecture, delivered in increasingly tight voices:

"These are precision tools."

"These are not souvenirs."

"If you lose another set, we may have to reconsider your account."

After the third call he hung up slow, stared at the processor humming like it knew his shame, and made up his mind.

He drove down to the beauty-supply store that had folded up tighter than a clam at low tide. Dust on the windows. Curlers still in the display. Twenty bucks later he walked out with three discontinued mannequin heads — light-skinned, flawless symmetry, expressions fixed somewhere between patience and accusation.

Back at the lab he glued them to a plywood board. Painted color patches with leftover chemicals. Scribbled exposure notes in Sharpie. Built his own calibration target from spite, thrift, and pure Downeaster stubbornness.

They called it the Belfast Shirley.

Wicked smart fix. No more begging. No more lectures. Every roll of AGFA HDC 200 that ran through the Noritsu machine got balanced against those three silent girls.

Now cut sideways in time — to the fever dream that hit the lobsterman-artist the night before he borrowed them.

He was a regular. Paid in crumpled singles. Smelled of spray paint and kelp. Always tapped

the counter twice before leaving, like he was sealing a deal with the air itself.

That Thursday a plain white envelope showed up in his mailbox. No return address. Postmarked Los Angeles.

Inside: a postcard.

On the front, a grinning fellow holding something like a sword. Sun blazing behind him. On the back, in thick black Sharpie:

"See you in 2003. Bring the girls."

He woke up drenched, heart hammering like traps on a steel deck. Sat straight up and said out loud to nobody:

"Alright then."

Later he'd tell the techs he could still smell warm asphalt and movie-set fog in his hair.

Friday afternoon he walked into the lab and tapped the counter twice.

“Mind if I borrow the norm?”

The new hire laughed. The senior tech didn’t.

“You bring ’em back in one piece,” she said. “They’re company.”

He gave that sideways grin — the one that meant trouble was already scheduled — and carried the plywood board out into the bright salt air.

What he shot that night and the next day became legend.

He loaded a single roll of AGFA HDC 200 and turned the Ultimate Norm into four panels of evidence.

First panel.

Studio close-up. Straight calibration layout. The three heads lined up shoulder to shoulder — only now they wore full costume. Purple glasses perched on the dark bob. Thick vampire fangs gleaming under the strobes. Eyeliner so dramatic it would've made any factory chemist faint dead away.

They didn't look neutral anymore.

They looked ready.

Second panel.

Night on the Belfast waterfront. The mannequins crammed into a borrowed blue

convertible. One brandishing an orange water pistol like it was the fiercest weapon going.

Across the hood, stenciled in dripping white paint: KILL BILL.

Behind them the ONE HOUR BELFAST neon burned over the harbor like prophecy. Exactly the angle. Exactly the glow. Just like the postcard.

A deckhand passing by swore he heard one of the heads laugh.

Third panel.

Daylight by the rocks. Black tank tops now. Wind whipping gull cries into ribbons. One mannequin cradling a live iguana wearing a tiny paper party hat. Another aiming a yellow squirt gun toward the horizon like she meant to settle accounts with the Atlantic itself.

Boats moved slow in the distance.

Nobody waved.

Fourth panel.

Sunset. Back in the convertible. One girl raising a green bottle in triumph. The others caught mid-laugh — or mid-howl, hard to say which.

And slapped right across the foreground, stealing the whole scene, a crowned green frog sticker photobombed the frame like royalty claiming jurisdiction.

Neon reflections trembled in the water.

The harbor seemed in on the joke.

He dropped the roll off late Friday.

Saturday morning the processor warmed up. Chemistry circulating. Rollers turning. The senior tech — the one who never joked about calibration — set the Belfast Shirley board in place and dialed the balance like she always did.

When the strip came out, still damp, the whole staff crowded the counter.

Silence first.

Then a whisper:

“Those are our mannequins.”

Another voice:

“And how in tarnation did he stage the neon like that?”

The new hire swallowed.

“That sign wasn’t even installed yet.”

From the doorway the artist tapped the counter twice.

"Postcard from the future," he said.

Nobody laughed.

Word traveled faster than tide.

Folks started asking for THE BELFAST SHIRLEYS by name. Wanted their wedding portraits "balanced heroic." Their baby photos "done with the frog luck." Teenagers begged to borrow the board for band promos and Halloween epics.

A year later the lab quietly retired the single-head setup altogether. Ordered the new multiracial reference strip the industry had finally begun shipping — three women, three tonal anchors, a wider dynamic range that let

every complexion step forward into the light instead of negotiating with it.

Progress arrived in a padded envelope.

Signed for like medicine.

But they never threw out the originals.

The three mannequin heads stayed in the window. Still do. Yellowed tape. Faint eyeliner ghosts. One fang missing since ’04. If you look close at dusk, you can see the green frog sticker reflected in the glass even though it isn’t there anymore.

Every roll that runs through the machine today still remembers those pale faces in its color curves. Memory lives in emulsions the way salt lives in rope.

Only now the norm isn’t silent.

Now she's wearing vampire fangs.

Holding a squirt gun.

Laughing into neon.

Waiting for another postcard.

One hour in Belfast.

Colour-balanced on a home-made standard.

And finally — ayuh — wicked free.

The Bibliographic Perimeter

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